



MEDIA CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

A staggering number of young people are putting their health in jeopardy by engaging in behaviors with serious short- and long-term consequences. According to CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, only 27% of children in the United States attend physical education classes daily—down from 42% in just the past 9 years. Decreasing physical activity, coupled with unhealthful eating, has resulted in a doubling of the percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight over the past 20 years. Emerging trends of type 2 diabetes in youth may be one of the first consequences of the epidemic of obesity in youth. Tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use remain high, as are the rates of teenage depression and suicide. Every year, almost 1 million adolescents become pregnant, and about 3 million become infected with a sexually transmitted disease. Given the implications of physical inactivity and other unhealthy, risky behaviors, efforts to improve adolescent well-being must address these behaviors.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC launched *VERB™ It's what you do*, a national multicultural campaign to promote healthy lifestyles among “tweens” (9 to 13 years old) in 2002. The goal of the campaign is to increase and maintain physical activities among tweens through media; public and private sector partnerships; and community efforts with the support and involvement of parents and adult and teen role models. In 2003, the campaign built awareness and affinity for VERB brand among tweens. The VERB campaign exceeded CDC's 1-year awareness target (that tweens have seen the campaign and know what it is about). Seventy-four percent of tweens are aware of the VERB brand and tell us that VERB is “cool.” This positive acceptance of VERB positions the campaign to motivate tweens to get and stay physically active. Through contests, tours, sweepstakes, and the Internet, VERB directly touched almost 5 million children and parents. The campaign has been seen 46 million times nationwide with 147 broadcast, print, and online placements. Audience research is conducted continuously to ensure the ads resonate with youth and parents.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Today's young people are a generation with high rates of media consumption including television, radio, music, print, and Internet use. These media sources offer a tremendous opportunity to market healthy behaviors to young people. The youth media campaign has been planned as a 5-year effort and will continue to involve young people in all aspects of planning and implementing of fresh, new ideas to keep the campaign relevant for young audiences. Building on the success of its initial phase to create awareness for VERB, the campaign enters its second phase with messages designed to encourage tweens to be physically active on a continued basis. The second phase of the VERB campaign focuses on providing tweens with opportunities and access to fun, physically inspiring events and activities throughout the year.